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ABSTRACT

An extensive body of knowledge is showing that the links between how teachers think and feel about themselves affects their performance. One coordinator of a new teacher program, comprised of teachers from preschool to high school, asks her new teachers to reflect by writing biography poetry. The coordinator used the poem framework at the beginning and end of the year. Her students appear to be more long-winded and have much more to say in June, and she does not let them see what they wrote in September until they have written their June sample. They are amazed that they have a tendency to be more classroom and student oriented in June than in September. Many of the new teachers felt that this exercise helped them see how far they had come; others centered on the concepts, and were surprised by their choice of words over the year. The teachers saw their growth, encouraged the students to grow, and felt good about their classrooms. (Contains 5 references. Appended are a biography poem form and new teacher reflections samples.) (NKA)

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ED 428 387

OBTAINING NEW TEACHER PERCEPTIONS USING REFLECTIVE POETRY

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OBTAINING NEW TEACHER PERCEPTIONS USING REFLECTIVE POETRY

The important concept of how teachers view themselves and others is growing. An extensive body of knowledge is showing that the links between how teachers think and feel about themselves, affects their performance. Many educators would say, "sure common sense will tell you that." The key to this is that researchers are beginning to quantify this link (Sprinthall, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall, 1996).

> *"Effective teacher education programs are based on a conception of teacher growth and development; acknowledge the complexities of classroom, school, and community; are grounded in a substantial and verifiable knowledge base; and are sensitive to the ways teachers think, feel, and make meanings from their experiences" (p.687).*

Add to this the research that shows how this performance links teachers to their students' cognitive outcomes, and teacher educators begin to ask the following questions:

- How can we best help or assist our preservice and new teachers?
- How do we tap into their views of themselves, assist them to reflect on this, and begin to apply it?

Those of us who have taught for many years know that new teachers are literally swamped in paper work during their first year. They do not have the time or luxury to reflect on who they are and what they are about. Yet, if research is telling us that we need this piece to be a part of their everyday lives we need to find ways to assist them. As teacher educators, we need to set the example and show the novice ways in which

to do this. Not only that, we must assist them and be able to discuss our findings with them in a non-threatening and encouraging environment.

If the new teacher is to meet the INTASC Standards, or any standards imposed by their state, districts, etc. we must find innovative ways to encourage them to reflect on a regular basis. We must, therefore, set up new ways to show them that we are a community working together. Talking to another individual, sharing a thought in writing, or viewing another teacher provides food for thought.

New teacher and/or induction programs [whatever you want to label them] must include this as an ongoing piece for the novice. The person / s who are conducting this type of support program must reflect on and find vehicles to best serve the novices needs. The necessary support and how to get there is the subject of much discussion. No two people agree on exactly how this will be achieved. The key is that there are outlets for the teacher novice to explore his/her ideas, needs, frustrations, and successes.

As the Coordinator of our ongoing New Teacher Program for the past ten years, I have found reflection to be the most significant piece for the novice. Over the years I have changed this from a weekly, monthly dialogue, to a random completion of the reflection forms I created. Asking them to write down their thoughts on a monthly or weekly basis is and has not been as successful as I would like it. I have been able to get them to verbally express their feelings about positive and negative aspects, but the written piece has been hard in coming.

I continued looking to see if I can obtain or create something that would be similar, yet not as time consuming. Several years ago I read an article in the *Journal of Reading* authored by Sara Garfield (1993), who had used biography poetry with her

classroom students. It was simple, to the point, they enjoyed it, and it provided her with a variety of insights into her students. As I looked at the structure of the poem I thought, why not try this strategy in my new teacher session. I adapted it to meet my needs and hoped for the best. Over the years I readapted and changed when and how I use the poem, but it has proven to be quite successful.

Rather than add to the new teacher's frustration of writing for me at each and every meeting to assess growth, I began to use the poem framework three times a year. Presently I am down to using it at the beginning and end of the year. What I see, the new teacher's see, and its simplicity has been wonderful.

I looked through the research and various articles and found practically zero use of poetry to gain insight into the mind of the new teacher. We have reflective journals, discussions, meetings, etc., but nothing that can get to their soul. Using this simple six line poem to tell who they are at the year's beginning and end says it all. The use of poetry to gain insight into the novice's thinking is short, simple, and involves less than 15 minutes of their time and our meeting.

This activity allows Dewey's words (1938, p.35) to ring true

> ***A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of the actual experience by environing conditions but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth.***

Couple Dewey's words with Simmons and Sparks (1988) who discuss models of clinical supervision and we begin to see a picture emerge. One that may enhance our teacher novice's growth.

> ***The difficulty we see with current models of clinical supervision and their variations is that they emphasize analyzing teacher and learner behaviors as they occur rather than analyzing the more comprehensive evidence of teacher thinking, the instructional decisions which are made, and their results. We believe that conventional clinical supervision needs to be updated to focus on the inter-connections among the thinking, beliefs, and behaviors involved in the act of teaching. (p.35)***

Although these comments may be more supervisory related, it reiterates the fact that we want new teachers to make connections between their teaching, thinking and how it impacts their classrooms.

I have attached a sampling of poems from the past three years in the attached Appendix. The top portion is from their first September start, and the bottom portion relating to the year's end in June. As you review them you will find that many times the same words appear at both the beginning and end of the year. They appear to be more long-winded and have much to say in June. I do not let them see what they wrote in September until they have written their June sample. I then provide them with copies and we discuss what they see from September to June. It amazes them that they have a tendency to be more classroom and student oriented in June than in September. The group is comprised of teachers from preschool to high school. As we talk together, they feel comfortable in sharing their comments and even their poetry!

When you look at their poetry samples, the similarities are evident even though their situations vary by grade, area, and comfort level. Many felt this exercise truly helped them see how far they had come. Others centered on the concepts, and were totally surprised by their choice of words over the year. In reality they saw their growth, encouraged the students to grow, and felt good about their classrooms. Many indicated afterward that they had or will be trying this with their classrooms next year.

As you read their comments put yourself into a similar situation. Put your thoughts down and compare them to the novice. The overriding question may be, are we really any different than the new teacher? Don't our feelings and reactions change depending upon our levels of calm, frustration, etc.? The main process to remember is that we are all learning and expanding who we are at the end of each school year based on our challenges, growth, and vision as teachers.

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APPENDIX

- Biography Poem

- Sample: New Teacher Reflections

MEETING NOTES

BIOGRAPHY POEM / Spring 1999

your name

use 4 adjectives describing yourself in a positive way — **I AM**

name 3 things — **I AM A TEACHER OF**

name 3 things — **WHO FEELS**

name 3 things — **WHO FEARS**

name 3 things — **WHO HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL**

name 3 things — **WHO WOULD LIKE TO**

last name

Adapted from Garfield, Sara. Journal of Reading, 37:1, September 1993, pp.55-56.

JTB/BTAGENDA

Shawn

I am innovative, enthusiastic, comforting, comfortable

I am a teacher of children, students, individuals

Who feels excited, interested, nervous

Who fears parents, vomit, chaos

Who has been successful in finding a job, in fulfilling my dream, in making a child feel good about him/herself

Who would like to get rehired, make a difference in a child's life, move out

Shawn

I am patient, flexible, fortunate, excited about next year

I am a teacher of children, students, myself

Who feels tired, overwhelmed, on the right track

Who fears vomit, parents, not being employed at

Who has been successful getting into a routine, in seeing students succeed, in dealing with parents (most)

Who would like to be at [illegible] in 3rd grade next year, get a great second evaluation, continue to learn

John

I am caring, eager, courageous, humorous

I am a teacher of life, words, empowerment

Who feels frustrated, comfortable, concerned

Who fears disunity, confrontation, melancholy

Who has been successful overcoming life, raising a family, knowing myself

Who would like to relax, read more, write a book

John

I am persistent, creative, sincere, street-wise

I am a teacher of careers, ideas, problem-solving

Who feels empowered, more confident, in-touch

Who fears only those things which are fearsome, stagnation, a lion cub

Who has been successful coping, relating and planning

Who would like to continue to smile, be abducted by clingons, leave this life filled with energy and not because I am tired

Laura

I am organized, friendly, caring, disciplined

I am a teacher of manners, life skills, tolerance

Who feels overwhelmed, successful, important

Who fears chaos, noise, vomit

Who has been successful teaching kids, relating to parents, getting a good job

Who would like to be a successful teacher, stepmother, make a difference in children's lives

Laura

I am organized, flexible, loving, structured

I am a teacher of special ed., getting along with others, self-esteem

Who feels tired, frustrated, challenged

Who fears not doing enough, being a "bad" teacher, throw-up

Who has been successful creating a positive classroom environment, "loving" the "unlovable", building self-esteem

Who would like to improve teaching skills, improve academic focus, be more creative in lesson plans

Susan

I am warm, funny compassionate and passionate

I am a teacher of reading, writing and speaking (communication)

Who feels sick, tired but proud

Who fears failure, disappointment

Who has been successful in school, professionally

Who would like to secure tenure, a husband and children

Susan

I am funny, friendly, outgoing, loving

I am a teacher of reading, writing, speaking

Who feels friendship, energetic, trusted

Who fears failure, exhaustion, boredom

Who has been successful teaching, caring learning

Who would like to make a difference, make life fun and encourage my students to enjoy reading

Judi

I am organized, energetic, creative and sensitive

I am a teacher of humans, thinkers and discoverers

Who feels joyful, motivated, and positive

Who fears loss of organization, loss of life, loss of autonomy

Who has been successful learning new things, in embracing my students and working with my peers

Who would like to help my students explore, create, and enjoy

Judi

I am energetic, curious, motivated and creative

I am a teacher of human beings, beautiful children, the future

Who feels empowered, joyful, and optimistic

Who fears loss, desolation, isolation

Who has been successful connecting with, embracing and getting to know life

Who would like to help my students touch the stars, give them all of my energy and help them to live, love and laugh always

Patrick

I am enthusiastic, dedicated, concerned, professional

I am a teacher of honesty, motivation, self-esteem

Who feels pain, accomplished, successful

Who fears failure, isolation, non-acceptance

Who has been successful counseling, golfing, being a good friend and husband

Who would like to be happy, love life, continued success

Patrick

I am compassionate, funny, happy, professional

I am a teacher of honesty, guidance, wisdom

Who feels joy, love, pain

Who fears rejection, death, invasive medical procedures

Who has been successful academically, athletically, emotionally

Who would like to help, cure, comfort

Debbie

I am enthusiastic, ambitious, busy, happy

I am a teacher of 5th grade, students, myself

Who feels energized, interested, caring

Who fears nothing, everything, parents, rejection, failure, "rifting"

Who has been successful learning, getting a job quickly, networking

Who would like to stay at Nelson, get rehired, teach forever

Debbie

I am ambitious, fortunate, hard-working, compassionate

I am a teacher of fifth graders, children, knowledge

Who feels good, somewhat confident, fortunate

Who fears rifting, not reaching most of my children, rejection

Who has been successful getting a job right after student teaching, finishing my long term goal of getting my teaching certificate, making good friends

Who would like to plan more exciting lessons, get my masters in the next four years, stay at Nelson School

Brandon

I am dedicated, motivated, positive

I am a teacher of morality, lifelong goals, physical fitness

Who feels compassion, need for change, restless

Who fears failure, giving in, no change

Who has been successful with people, coaching, staying motivated

Who would like to continue growth, continue school, continue happy

Brandon

I am a dedicated teacher. I am a compassionate teacher. I am a dedicated teacher. I am a happy teacher

I am a teacher of wisdom. I am a teacher of good health and body. I am a teacher of lifetime activity

Who feels compassion for my students. Who feels the fire to teach. Who feels comfortable at my school

Who fears not getting the material across. I am a teacher who fears not reaching them all. Who fears not doing enough

Who has been successful fitting in to my surroundings, been successful at socially fitting in with my students, who has been successful at getting to know each student

Who would like to continue growing in my own knowledge, continue reaching my students, continue to look for new and innovative ways to teaching

Diane

I am caring, concerned, happy, excited

I am a teacher of children, tolerance, awareness

Who fells children are wonderful, life is great and my days go fast

Who fears

Who has been successful as a parent, as a partner, in helping people feel special

Who would like to have a positive influence on children, share a smile with others, observe the success of my girls

Diane

I am happy, content, capable of joking with students and strict

I am a teacher of life skills, research, young children

Who feels challenged, hugs are great, satisfied

Who fears loosing patience, hurting a young child's feelings

Who has been successful encouraging the children to achieve, promoting learning as challenging and fun, nurturing children

Who would like to continue working with children, having a positive influence on children's lives, be remembered with affection by my students

Virginia

I am eager, enthusiastic, excited

I am a teacher of children, experimentation

Who feels excited, nervous, ambitious

Who fears failing

Who has been successful as a student, as a teacher, as a friend

Who would like to keep learning, try new things, have all the resources

Virginia

I am happy, clear, determined, reliable

I am a teacher of children, coworkers and friends

Who feels comfortable, secure and tired

Who fears failure, being lonely, negative people

Who has been successful interesting project, reaching certain students, making new friends

Who would like to have more time, have more resources, have a vacation!!